

From: Johnson, Bradley R
To: 'microsoft.atr(a)usdoj.gov'
Date: 11/19/01 7:59pm
Subject: Anti-Trust Case Against Microsoft

Dear Sir or Madam,

I heard that you were soliciting feedback from consumers regarding the MS anti-trust case. I am a mac-user, and have used MS Office products for over 8 years. I am a scientist with a PhD in materials science and engineering, and I use several different computing platforms (mac, PC, unix, etc.) and a multitude of different software applications on a regular basis. I am quite computer literate. For me, cross-platform compatability and cross-application compatability is essential to my work. Microsoft, with its proprietary file formats, and monopoly market share domination of desktop publishing environment make my job very difficult, and hence, by default, I am required to use their software in order to move and share information between computers and different clients.

I think that Microsoft should be treated as a monopoly and regulated/controlled/penalized for aggressive and predatory business practices. I cite the following reasons:

1. Because they have a dominant (monopoly) market share position, and because their software formats are proprietary, third party file translators don't work very well. Hence in order to share computer file information with other people or between different platforms, one is essentially forced to use their software.

2. Even within their own software, file translation between platforms (mac -> pc) has bugs and problems. They have made great improvements over the last 7 years, but there are still problems. (e.g. sharing a mac Word 2001 document with embedded windows metafiles with a PC user with Word2000 doesn't work - the images don't show up on their machine.) The solution for this problem is that the consumer has to purchase a new version of the software. They don't support their software with bug fixes for a very long time. I had problems with the performance of Word6.0.1 for the mac. The solution was to purchase Word 98. I had lots of problems with performance and stability with Word98 - the solution was to purchase Word2001. I have discovered problems with Word2001. The solution? Buy Word v. X. Since there are no other market competators, they can pass off bug fixes and new releases and charge consumers full price without really ever fixing or solving the problem. If the software worked as advertised, that'd be one thing, but to pay full price for buggy software, and then be told that all the problems will be fixed in the next release is not fair to the consumer. Consequently, I think that they should be required to maintain their software with annual or semi-annual bug fixes and updates for a period of at least three years.

3. They have used their dominant market share and proprietary file formats as leverage to eliminate competition from other software

competitors. For example, look at the fate of WordPerfect and Corel Office. Word perfect at one time dominated the word processing market, and now it is essentially defunct. On the PC side, this product still exists, but it has been discontinued on the mac side - this especially smells fishy considering Microsoft's recent investment in Corel. One may ask, why not let Apple make a competitor for MS Office - the answer is pretty clear. MS would quickly drop MS Office for the mac, and thus there would be no way for mac users to share files with PC users. Consequently, what small number of mac users that exist would be eliminated from the business world, because they would be forced to switch to PC to get their work done. The lost revenue of these mac users would further diminish the viability of Apple, and the company could ultimately go under. At one time, this was such a significant issue for Apple, that they traded software rights for a promise from MS that they would sustain MS Office development on the mac.

I don't know if anyone will read this, but I hope so, and I hope that it might be useful in this case.

-Bradley R. Johnson